

The Role of Athletics in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT. Major reform is needed in intercollegiate athletics. Athletics have a part in higher education but athletic scholarships do not. The current system of athletic scholarships is hurting higher education both financially and academically. There are several possible reform options but the best option is to completely overhaul the current system and make college athletics a truly amateur operation.

I. Introduction

“By what right do you take money and give it to students whose qualifications are that they are first-rate athletes instead of students who are scholars?”

Donald Kagan, former athletic director at
Yale University [Sperber, 1990, 275]

In 1852, Harvard and Yale squared off in the first intercollegiate athletic contest [Chu, 1989, 53]. The crew contest started what was to become the multi-billion dollar industry of college sports. Questions regarding the role of sport within the context of higher education have and always will plague college athletics. Why is it that government tax dollars support what appears to be entertainment? Why are college scholarship dollars allocated to those who perform athletically? Should college athletics continue to be a part of higher education? These are questions that demand answers. Athletics do have a part in higher education. Athletic scholarships do not.

To better understand the purposes of athletics within the context of higher education, one must first look at the role of higher education in general. Why is it that the public finances education, particularly higher education? From an economic standpoint, it is believed that education provides a positive externality. Educated people are thought to be more productive members of society. Higher education develops people into active, thinking, and beneficial members of society. It is believed that by financing higher education with taxpayer dollars, society as a whole benefits. It is important to note, however, that higher education in the United States is also financed by tuition, bequests, and other nongovernmental sources [Chu, 1989, 17]. In fact during the 1984-1985

fiscal year state institutions received only 43.6% of their revenues from state legislative appropriations [Chu, 1989, 17]. Nevertheless, taxpayers do pay a great deal for higher education because it is believed that in the long run those dollars are better spent on education than remaining in the pockets of those who worked so hard to earn the money.

II. Background

Sports have long been a part of the college setting. “In theory at least, college sports provided an opportunity for teaching people about character, motivation, endurance, loyalty, and the attainment of one’s personal best—all great qualities of great value in citizens” [Duderstadt, 2000, 70]. Athletics contribute to a well-rounded education. Students controlled and financed early college sport (from 1870-1900) almost exclusively [Chu, 1989, 53]. Viewed as extracurricular activities, intercollegiate athletics were not viewed as part of education until the 1920s [Chu et al., 1985, 8]. In this sense, early college athletics had many of the same objectives as modern intramural sports. Intramural sports are extracurricular activities thought to contribute to the overall educational experience of a college student. Although intramural sports may not be “real” sports at the modern university, they still teach the same things as “real” sports.

Athletics were viewed as an important means of drawing attention to the university. As early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, college administrators felt that athletic success attracted money from the state, alumni and other donors [Chu, 1989, 57]. This led to several problems. The perceived benefits of athletic success produced a greater incentive to win at all costs. As early as the 1890s players were paid under the table [Rader, 1999, 91]. Student-managed athletic teams soon gave way to college and university financed teams. The schools began to take responsibility for hiring and paying coaches, arranging and financing games and travel, the building of athletic venues, and promoting college sports in general [Chu, 1989, 57].

The incentive for winning continued to grow and eventually led to the first athletic scholarships. In the 1930s, struggling athletic conferences, including the Southwest and Southeastern conferences, adopted scholarships to lure athletes away from power conferences (chiefly the Ivy League, Big Ten, and Pacific Coast) [Sperber, 2000, 270]. Initially, athletic scholarships were met with great skepticism. The Ivy League, in

particular, was adamant in its disapproval of athletic scholarships [Sperber, 2000, 271]. Despite the widespread concerns, the NCAA adopted athletic scholarships across the board in 1953 [Sperber, 2000, 271]. To this day, the Ivy League does not give athletic scholarships and it is not a coincidence that the Ivy League is considered the premier academic “conference”. Today, all college athletic programs, with the exception of the aforementioned Ivy League and Division III schools, give partial or full scholarships to some of their student-athletes.

In 1953, NCAA president Walter Byers coined the term student-athlete [Sperber, 2000, 271]. Today, the term student-athlete is vilified by many and even criticized by the athletes themselves:

When you go to college, you’re not a student-athlete but an athlete-student. Your main purpose is not to be an Einstein but a ballplayer, to generate some money, put people in the stands. Eight or ten hours of your day are filled with basketball, football. The rest of your time, you’ve got to motivate yourself to make sure you get something back.

-Isaiah Thomas, former Indiana University basketball player [quoted in Sperber, 1990, 302]

Statements like these raise some serious questions about the integrity of athletics within the system of higher education. Most importantly, given the concerns about the inclusion of athletics, why is it that athletics continue to be a part of the university?

III. Why include athletics in higher education?

There are three main reasons for the inclusion of sport as part of college. Sports aid the overall development of young people. Sports also contribute to increased academic performance and upward occupational/social mobility. Finally and sadly, the inclusion of athletics has a lot to do with the bottom line.

A. SPORTS AID THE OVERALL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The first point is critical in the analysis of higher education. Higher

education is financed publicly because it is thought to have a positive externality. Therefore, whether sport contributes to the overall education of a person is vital to any discussion of the merit of sports in college. So the question becomes: Do sports aid in the development of young adults and help to contribute to a more productive society?

It has long been believed that sports develop character. This attitude is reflected by the words of General Douglas MacArthur:

Sport is a vital character builder. It molds the youth of our country for their roles as custodians of the republic. It teaches them to be strong enough to know they are weak, and brave enough to face themselves when they are afraid. It teaches them to be proud and unbending in honest defeat, but humble and gentle in victory [quoted in Chu, 1989, 65].

MacArthur's views reflect the ideals held by many college administrators. Values such as dedication, sacrifice, teamwork, integrity, and leadership are all thought to be positive characteristics generated by sport [Duderstadt, 2000, 189]. In team sports, there is much to be learned from a group of people sacrificing their own goals for the common good of the whole. Individual sports provide a unique opportunity to push one's self to the maximum. There is little doubt that these ideas favor the inclusion of athletics in college.

In a special report to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Jay Olivia, chancellor and executive vice president for Academic Affairs at New York University, lists three ways in which athletics contribute to the development of character. First, he points out that students are seldom provided with an opportunity to put their talent and ego on the line and to exhibit strengths and weaknesses outside of athletics [Olivia, 1989, 1]. Life outside of college is full of opportunities to put talent and weaknesses on the line. Athletics teach one to handle pressure. Second, he points out that athletics provide a unique opportunity for young adults to learn to organize their life [Olivia, 1989, 2]. Balancing practice, games, classes, travel and study is an incredibly difficult thing to do. One must determine priorities and be disciplined; these are skills that are useful in life. Finally, Olivia points out that athletics encourage one to invest time, energy, and commitment to a goal even in the face of possible defeat [Olivia, 1989, 2]. It requires great dedication to get up off the mat, so to speak, and get back in the game.

There are critics of the idea that sport develops character. In a study done by researchers at San Jose State University over an eight-year period, no empirical evidence was found to support the traditionally held belief that sport builds character [Chu, 1985, 268]. The same researchers claimed that there are a variety of problems associated with sport and several major syndromes that can be found in athletes including: the con-man athlete (the athlete who will do anything, including cheating, to get ahead), the hyper anxious athlete (the athlete who gets abnormally nervous about performing well), the athlete who resists coaching (the athlete who is not teachable), the injury-prone athlete (the athlete who will often use excuses, such as injury, to explain lack of production), and the depression-prone athlete (the athlete that lets athletics affect his or her mental state) [Chu, 1985, 268].

Of course, the types of people that are found in athletics can be found in any academic pursuit. Not every student who does well in college does so as a result of their strong character. For, instance, in a study of economic majors at the University of Northern Iowa it would not be too hard to find the con-man economist, the hyper anxious economist, the depression-prone economist and so on and so forth. The truth is that there are very few absolutes in life. It cannot be said that all athletics will produce good character. On the whole, however, athletics produce characteristics in a person that are desirable.

The problem with any kind of evaluation of character is that it is subjective. How can a person determine beyond a shadow of a doubt if person x has greater character than person y? Can it be known for sure that character improves from participating in athletics if character can't be measured? There must be a more objective way to study the benefits of athletics.

B. SPORTS CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND UPWARD MOBILITY

If the goal of attending college is to obtain an education and not to perform on an athletic field, then it is important to compare academic achievement between athletes and non-athletes. Results are mixed. In 1997, 58% of Division I athletes graduated, while 56% of all other students graduated [Duderstadt, 2000, 198]. This is not an isolated statistic. In the 1970's, both male and female college athletes graduated at a higher rate than other students [Long, 1991, para. 1]. Also, in a study

of Division III athletes (non-scholarship athletes), it was shown that student-athletes have higher GPA's and graduation rates than non-student athletes [Robst, 2000, para. 1]. In addition, males who participated in intercollegiate athletics receive about 4 percent more annual income than similar nonathletes [Long, 1991, para. 1].

However, some refute these claims. Researchers point to evidence of transcript alterations, recruiting violations, grade forging, and the tendency for athletes to enroll in easier courses as proof of the hollowness of such arguments [Chu, 1989, 72]. The objections, however, hold little water. There is no doubt that there is great fraud, especially at the Division I level. At the Division III level, however, it is hard to believe that there are widespread transcript alterations, recruiting violations, grade forging, etc. The successes of Division III athletes academically gives credibility to the statement that athletics encourage academic success and subsequently lead to upward mobility after college. However, it must be noted that there is a potential self-selection bias at work. It is possible that only people with great academic ability may want to participate in sports with no compensation.

Any discussion of college athletics would be incomplete without discussing differences in sports at the college level. To quote James J. Duderstadt:

In the majority of sports programs, athletes are students first and athletes second. They achieve academic honors just as frequently as other undergraduates do. However, football and basketball do not. These sports have developed cultures with low expectations for academic performance [Duderstadt, 2000, 191].

Duderstadt's thoughts represent reality. The average academic achievement of student-athletes in football and basketball is lower than that of the student body at-large [Duderstadt, 2000, 199]. In basketball, only 41 percent of athletes graduate [Duderstadt, 2000, 199]. Additionally, the average athlete on a top football or men's basketball team enters college in the bottom quarter of his graduating class [Duderstadt, 2000, 199]. In any discussion of college athletics, football and men's basketball are in a completely different category than other sports. This is important because it is these very sports that provide the money for college athletics.

C. INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORTS AND MONEY

Sports within the college setting are often justified on financial grounds. The financial argument for the continued existence of intercollegiate athletics is extremely complicated. On the surface, college athletics are a financial burden to a university. Yet, if college athletics were to cease to exist, a lot of unhappy people would be out of a lot of money. No discussion of college athletics would be complete without talking about the bottom line.

There is a widespread myth among the public, and even among university officials, that college athletics generate a great deal of profit. That is simply not true. College athletics may generate a lot of revenue, but it does not generate profit. In the late 1980's it was estimated that of the 802 members of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), the 493 members of the NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletes) and the 1,050 nonaffiliated junior colleges, only 10 to 20 programs consistently generate a profit (usually small) [Sperber, 1990, 2]. In any given year 20 to 30 will break even or do better and the other 2,300 institutions lose anywhere from a few dollars to millions of dollars [Sperber, 1990, 2]. The problem is that most administrators focus only on the revenues associated with athletics. So, in an effort to generate revenue, athletic departments will spend more. This does generate more revenue but usually even greater costs. This is not a sound way of thinking.

1. Revenues

An athletic program generates revenues in a variety of ways including ticket sales, guarantees, payouts from bowl games and tournaments, TV and radio deals, booster club donations, student fees and assessments, state or other government support and other miscellaneous means (including corporate sponsorships) [Sperber, 1990, vii]. Television is often thought to be the means by which most college athletic programs make their money. TV contracts produce some eye-popping numbers. Recently, CBS paid 6 billion dollars (550 million per year) for the rights to televise the NCAA men's basketball tournament [Duderstadt, 2000, 129]. Ticket sales, however, are still the primary means to generate money. There is even some evidence that television has a negative impact on overall athletic revenues due to overexposure of events, which leads to

dwindling gate receipts [Duderstadt, 2000, 130]. Television affects gate receipts negatively at every level. Division III games may never be on TV, but that does not mean that TV does not negatively affect Division III. For example, many fans will stay home to watch the “big” game between Big Time state universities instead of going to watch the game between Little Guy colleges.

There is another problem that is associated with ticket revenue. In order to generate more ticket revenue, more games have to be played [Sperber, 1990, 35]. The obvious effect is that a student-athlete is required to spend more and more time out of class. The former head of Georgetown University, the Reverend Timothy J. Healy, said, “The length and intensity of seasons are positively ridiculous” [Sperber, 1990, 35]. The problem will not be eased either. As long as gate receipts are the number one form of revenue, there will always be an incentive to play more games. Just this year, in fact, Iowa State University played a school record 14 football games. College football seasons have traditionally been only 11 games with a possible twelfth game coming in the form of a bowl game.

Guarantees are also an important, but little known, part of athletic department revenue. Guarantees are the payments to visiting teams of fees and/or percentages of the gate revenue [Sperber, 1990, 38]. Unfortunately, these guarantees are often given to smaller schools in exchange for a “certain” victory for a big-time university. For instance, on September 14, 2002, Eastern Illinois traveled to Kansas State to play in a football game, which Kansas State won 63-13. Almost assuredly Eastern Illinois did not travel to Manhattan, Kansas, thinking they could get a win. They most definitely did not travel to Manhattan to see the sights. Rather, they played because they were getting paid a large sum of money, upwards of \$200,000. Even as far back as 1984, the University of Miami generated over 1 million dollars in athletic revenue by showing up at away football games [Sperber, 1990, 39].

Bowl game payouts and NCAA tournament payouts are actually quite a bit less than the newspaper reports imply. For instance, a typical payout for a Bowl Championship Series game is around 12 million dollars [Duderstadt, 2000, 131]. The money disappears though, because most of it is shared with conference members and other members of the NCAA. In addition, the NCAA keeps around 40-50% of total net receipts from the NCAA basketball tournament in order to pay for expenses and to balance its own books [Sperber, 1990, 43].

One of the fastest growing areas of revenue for the athletic department is supporters' donations. Some have argued that even if a school could not cover its expenses with ticket sales and television revenues, the deficit could be made up by increased donor contributions [Chu, 1985, 299]. The argument goes something like this: the program that spends more money will experience more success and thus bring in more alumni contributions. From this logic, the practice of exorbitant spending gathers steam. There is evidence that winning has some effect on alumni contributions, but it is probably overrated. A study published in *Contemporary Economic Policy* showed that from the period 1986 to 1996 year-to-year changes in athletic success had no impact on giving by non-alumni [Rhoads, 2000, para. 28]. However, evidence showed that alumni responded in a positive way to football bowl wins and responded negatively when the NCAA placed a school on probation [Rhoads, 2000, para. 28]. In addition, a school with a long-standing tradition in either football or basketball prior to the sample period did have a positive impact on giving from both groups (alumni and non-alumni) [Rhoads, 2000, para. 28]. A separate study in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* reported that contributions to a university are positively related to the overall winning percentage of the intercollegiate sports program [Grimes, 1994, para. 1]. However, it is hard to argue that athletic success or even the presence of athletics always encourages giving. According to an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and reported in Sperber [1990]: "Donations to Tulane University rose by 5 million in 1986, the year after the institution dropped basketball; annual giving at Wichita State University nearly doubled the year after officials suspended its debt-ridden football program" [Sperber, 1990, 73]. In truth, only 1 to 2 percent of all alumni contribute to the athletic programs of the college from which they graduated [Sperber, 1990, 71].

Student fees play a large role in financing most college athletic programs. Often, these fees are hidden in a category labeled as "activity fees". Students are seldom told exactly where these funds go. In Sperber's book, published in 1990, he reports that the latest NCAA survey showed that money raised from student fees and assessments averaged an astounding \$1,196,000 per athletic program for a school with Division I football [Sperber, 1990, 82]. At smaller schools with less access to outside money, students provided from 30 to 85 percent of athletic department funding [Sperber, 1990, 82]. In the year 1987-1988, every student at William and Mary paid more than \$500 individually to the

athletic program in the form of activity fees [Sperber, 1990, 82]. In the 1990's Northwestern University, a member of the Big Ten Conference and a private university, subsidized its athletic programs from general academic resources at the clip of about 8 million dollars a year [Duderstadt, 2000, 139]. It is no wonder that tuition continues to skyrocket. To blame athletics solely for the cost of increasing higher education would be a great mistake, but to say that athletics are completely free from any blame would also be a great error. From 1980 to 1995 tuition fees increased 234% at four-year public universities [Sperber, 2000, 95]. Athletics have something to do with this.

There is also a commonly held misconception that taxpayers do not directly pay for athletics in the sense that state-appropriated funds do not go directly to the athletic department. That is not true. In 1985, the athletic departments of schools with Division I football programs received, on average, \$736,000 dollars straight from taxpayers [Sperber, 1990, 87]. In the mid 1990's, despite the fact that the football team was experiencing great success (thus generating more ticket sales and television revenue), the University of Wisconsin athletic program was given around \$634,000 per year from the state [Duderstadt, 2000, 139]. Taxpayers pay directly for athletic programs. Keep in mind that these are considered to be revenues of the athletic programs. The costs associated with athletic programs are more troubling.

2. Costs

There are major expenses associated with running a collegiate athletic department. Expenses include but are not limited to salaries, travel & recruiting costs, equipment & medicine, insurance, legal & office costs, capital expenditures and athletic scholarships [Sperber, 1990, vii].

The single greatest expense to a collegiate athletic program is salary payments to staff [Sperber, 1990, 94]. Coaches receive the greatest amount. A study of the highest paid officials in Iowa would show football and men's basketball coaches at the University of Iowa and Iowa State University at the top of the list. Despite the fact that tuition has grown astronomically in recent years, coach salaries have continued to increase dramatically. Travel and recruiting costs are continually growing as well. For instance, in 1985 the University of Georgia spent \$400,000 in travel costs for its football team alone [Sperber, 1990, 107]. Similar stories could be told across the nation, and of course expenses are higher in 2003.

The greatest expense might be a non-monetary cost, however. Most athletic programs budget well over half their travel costs for football and men's basketball alone. This leaves all other programs fighting for money, particularly the "non-revenue" sports. Consequently, the other programs are forced to spend countless hours in buses, missing precious class time. Athletes in the smaller programs are getting even less out of their education.

Equipment, supplies, medicine, insurance and legal costs all contribute to the many hidden costs of running a major athletic program. A more visible cost is capital expenditures. Multi-million dollar athletic complexes are strewn across the United States. In the 1980's, the University of North Carolina spent \$35 million to build the Dean Smith Arena [Sperber, 1990, 130]. North Carolina state legislator, Dan Blue, questioned such practices, "I'm not sure we should build places for gladiatorial display rather than build classrooms to benefit a wider variety of folk" [Sperber, 1990, 130]. Often, such construction is financed by private donations, which seems to justify the construction. Even if this is true the university is left with the cost of maintaining the facility. This is not cheap and is done at the expense of other campus buildings. In 1988, a survey of university facilities estimated the total cost for needed repairs at between 20 and 50 billion dollars [Sperber, 1990, 136].

The cost most relevant to this study is athletic scholarships. It is false to say that today's college athletes are amateurs just because they are not paid with cash. More and more people call for athletes to receive salaries. The state of Nebraska recently tried to pass legislation allowing the University of Nebraska to pay its football players a stipend in addition to the scholarships they already receive. Granted, a premium college football player—one eventually drafted by a professional sports team—is estimated to produce over \$500,000 in annual revenues for his school [Brown, 1993, para. 1]. But, by and large there are few athletes who will generate this type of revenue. In fact, most athletes in non-revenue sports (essentially not football or basketball) generate little for the university. Regardless, even for the premium athlete, an athletic scholarship is a valuable commodity. And one could argue that the premium athlete also benefits from the training that makes him more attractive to a professional team.

The University of Michigan provides an interesting case study of athletic scholarships. At Michigan, the typical instructional cost (not tuition) is \$20,000 per student [Duderstadt, 2000, 132]. Adding room and

board and other costs, the average investment per scholarship student-athlete is around \$30,000 a year [Duderstadt, 2000, 132]. This adds up to a total of \$120,000 to \$150,000, depending on if the athlete is at the university four or five years. This, in itself is of great value to the student-athlete. But why do typical students go to college? They feel that the cost of going to college is offset by future benefits. In other words, the value of a full scholarship is not just the value of the education immediately and monetarily but also the future value of being better educated. However, not even taking the added benefits into account (using the strict monetary cost of \$120,000 per athlete), the University of Michigan spends around 8 million dollars per year on athletic scholarships [Duderstadt, 2000, 140]. In contrast to need-based financial aid given to regular students, student athletes are given full-ride scholarships regardless of financial need or academic ability [Duderstadt, 2000, 140]. Herein lies the most troubling aspect of athletics within the realm of higher education. It is hard to believe that giving scholarships to students who are not serious about academics (keep in mind that only 41 percent of Division I basketball players will ever graduate) is a better use of the taxpayers' money than giving that money to academically gifted students with the potential to become doctors or professors—in short the future leaders of America.

In 1995-96, Division I schools lost a total of \$245 million dollars [Duderstadt, 2000, 133]. Evidence points to the fact that nearly every collegiate program loses money. Yet colleges continue to spend more and more money on athletics. Richard Lapchick, director of the Center for the Study of Sports at Northeastern University comments on the phenomenon:

Most Division I schools don't show a profit with sports. The odds against that are only slightly less than the high school kid who dreams of playing in the pros. But every school is chasing the dream of joining the elite, being one of the few who make money. To do so, the popular conception is, you have to spend more money to get there [Sperber, 1990, 138].

In the face of such facts, how is it that administrators that can continually justify running a deficit within an athletic department? Sperber claims that administrators will point out four benefits of athletics to a school outside of monetary issues: (1) it draws attention to a school; (2) it increases academic prestige; (3) it boosts student enrollment; (4) it builds

school spirit [Sperber, 1990, 139]. Taken separately, each of these arguments fails.

There is no evidence to show that sports attract positive attention. Any positive attention can easily be offset by negative publicity. For instance, in the late 1990s the University of Minnesota's men's basketball team was mired in an academic scandal. Publicity from this event was not good for the university as a whole. The second argument makes no sense either. There would be very few people who would argue that the Ivy League schools are not prestigious schools despite the fact that they do not offer athletic scholarships and have not won any major championships for many years.

The third argument is often referred to as the "Flutie Factor" [Sperber, 2000, 61]. In the year after Doug Flutie won the Heisman Trophy and his Boston College team beat Miami in the famous "Hail Mary" game, applications for admission at Boston College rose dramatically [Sperber, 2000, 61]. However, it is tough to separate Flutie from all other factors involved in the increase in admissions requests. Other examples point in the opposite direction. Enrollment climbed at Wichita State in 1987, the year after football was dropped [Sperber, 1990, 73]. Finally, it seems as if the school spirit argument is overrated. To go back to the University of Minnesota example, it is hard to think that the scandal created school spirit. For every school with great tradition and pride, there are numerous more which are failures year after year. It is hard to say, for instance, that the University of Northern Iowa athletic program generates great school pride, despite the quality of the teams. There are more people at Northern Iowa who would cheer for the University of Iowa or Iowa State than would cheer for the Panthers.

From a financial standpoint, providing athletic scholarships makes little sense. In fact, it prevents universities from allocating their funds in a better way and it drives up the cost of undergraduate education. There is, however, a great deal of money wrapped up in the system. Would CBS, with its 6 billion dollar contract with the NCAA, oppose placing limits on scholarships? Of course they would. If athletic scholarships were limited, it would diminish the product on the field greatly. It is quite the paradox. Universities are losing money every year, and yet they cannot afford to make wholesale changes.

IV. Intercollegiate athletics and undergraduate education

The greatest harm from the current athletic situation is that it hurts undergraduate education. The student-athlete is put in a tough academic position from the very start. Forced to give roughly 30 hours of their week to the sport in which they participate, it is tough to focus on academics. Add on travel time and the subsequent missed class time and it is tough to imagine that a Division I athlete gets the best possible education. Two-week road trips are not all that uncommon at many universities. A 1988 study by the NCAA found that the average athlete devoted 30 hours a week to his or her sport and 26 hours a week to studying and attending class [Rader, 1999, 267]. If the ultimate purpose of athletics is to enhance the academic experience of a student, it is hard to imagine that the current system does such a thing.

The harm to undergraduate education does not stop with the student-athlete, however. Students in general are hurt by the presence of athletics. The most obvious example is that of rising costs. As tuition rises, more and more qualified students will be unable to attend college because of financial considerations. College sports are part of the problem. Also, there is the lost chance of giving academic scholarships to the future leaders. Instead the money is given to athletes. There is also the problem of academic standards being lowered at a university. There is great incentive for a college to lower its admissions standards for premium athletes. In *Applied Economics*, Brown claims: “there are sizable revenues to be gained as a result of a school lowering its admission standards for incoming football players” [Brown, 1996, para. 30]. This is not a theoretical situation. Brown goes on to note that 30% of all Division I football and basketball players are granted special-authority admissions [Brown, 1996, para. 31]. It is hard to think that allowing more and more unqualified students into a university will increase academic quality. The current practices of athletic departments affect not just student-athletes, but also affect the student population as a whole.

V. Solutions

So what can be done? There are several possible solutions to the problems that plague the current system of intercollegiate athletics. One possible solution is to create a separate category of students who would train for professional sports careers [Duderstadt, 2000, 275]. In other words, colleges could allow students to study baseball, for instance, as their major. This system would create a watered-down education for those

pursuing professional athletics. Sadly enough, many schools are already engaged in this practice to some extent. Many athletes at big time universities are allowed to take joke classes in order to retain eligibility. This proposal undermines the goal of higher education completely. There is no way that this is a justifiable option.

A second option is to complete the professionalization of college sports and pay salaries to athletes [Duderstadt, 2000, 275]. This option is closer and closer to reality. The basic proposal would be to pay football and basketball players an additional salary (these are the only sports that turn a profit). The question with this approach again centers on the value of a college education. Is a college education not reward enough? Granted, many athletes may have troubles paying for everyday expenses, but so do regular students. The truth is that a college education is a commodity of far greater value than any possible pay-for-play proposal [Duderstadt, 2000, 277].

Yet another option is to spin off big-time sports from higher education-particularly basketball and football-and make them independent professional franchises [Duderstadt, 2000, 275]. This proposal makes a great deal of sense. The two sports could be reconfigured along the same lines as minor league teams in professional baseball, associated with the communities in which they compete [Duderstadt, 2000, 278]. Universities with Division I programs would be faced with one of two options. They could either continue to support the sports, but operate them as true commercial enterprises, or they could turn the programs into truly amateur programs, with no athletic scholarships, no red shirting, no freshman eligibility or spring practice [Duderstadt, 2000, 279]. Part of the current problem with athletic departments is that they operate separately from the university as a rule and yet have tax-exempt status as an “educational activity”. Minus institutional subsidies or tax-exempt status, athletic departments would quickly learn the benefits of keeping costs down like any other self-supporting business [Duderstadt, 2000, 278].

If a university decided to make athletics an amateur operation, there would be some consequences. Because football and basketball currently support non-revenue sports, the university would be faced with the burden of paying more to finance these non-revenue sports. Such a policy at the University of Michigan would cost around 15 million dollars; this would be financed by a 3 percent increase in tuition [Duderstadt, 2000, 280].

The second and greatest obstacle is that there would be great public outrage. College athletics is such a large part of our society that the public

has come to expect colleges to provide this form of entertainment. Tradition would have to be broken. The bottom line is that colleges do not exist to entertain the masses. Yet, college sports are such a large part of our culture that any effort to reform and especially to de-emphasize them will be met with great opposition [Duderstadt, 2000, 281].

The effect of making college sports professional endeavors would be positive. Much like minor league baseball and hockey, professional basketball and football teams would be forced to subsidize the development of their future employees. There is no reason why the NBA and NFL should not do this. Those universities that chose to support a professional team would have to do so on their own terms. There would be no more hiding behind the disguise of higher education. The universities that chose to become completely amateur would resemble the schools of the Ivy League and Division III. This is a good thing.

VI. Conclusion

The above proposal makes the most sense and should happen. It will not. The opponents are too vocal and will not allow such a thing to happen. There are a few things that can happen, however. For one, athletic departments can be held more accountable. Either the athletic departments should reflect the ideals of the university as a whole or they should operate as a separate entity, without tax-exempt status. An athletic department should not be allowed to bend admissions requirements. Although a university might lose out on potential premier athletes, the benefits of a better education for all students will be greater in the end. In addition, there is also evidence that Carnegie Research 1 schools which are more selective in admitting freshmen tend to receive the greatest volume of contributions from donors [Rhoads, 2000, para. 28]. In other words, people do value academic quality and will respond with their money to increases in academic prestige.

Athletics do have a part in higher education. The objective of athletics is to educate the entire person. Athletics is a part of this process. There is great value in participating in sports, from a character standpoint and from a standpoint of becoming a more effective member of society. Athletics are not a good financial endeavor, however. The practice of athletic scholarships hurts undergraduate education. There are options. College sports are supposed to be amateur events. They are not. In order to best maximize the ideal of athletics providing an education to the

person as a whole, a return to the heart of amateurism is necessary. Intercollegiate athletics needs reform. Until then, taxpayers will continue to pay for a system that is in sad shape. The problem is that people do not want change deep down. College sports must change, but it is hard to change when one eye is glued to the TV watching March Madness.

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